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ABSTRACT

Approaches to teaching about Southeast Asia are presented in this guide, with a special focus on the relationship between this region of the world and the United States. The guide's eight sections include: (1) Introduction: Southeast Asia and America Since 1492; (2) Where Is Southeast Asia; (3) Americans in Southeast Asia; (4) Southeast Asians in the United States; (5) People of Southeast Asia; (6) Politics in Southeast Asia; (7) Southeast Asia in the Larger World; and (8) The Future in United States-Southeast Asia Relations. Three maps included in an appendix depict the countries, languages, and religions of Southeast Asia. (DB)

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APPROACHES TO TEACHING ABOUT

SOUTHEAST ASIA

IN A WORLD CULTURES SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

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APPROACHES TO TEACHING ABOUT

SOUTHEAST ASIA

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CONTENTS

I Introduction: Southeast Asia and America Since 1492

II Where is Southeast Asia?

III Americans in Southeast Asia

IV Southeast Asians in the United States

V The People of Southeast Asia

A. Language and Culture

B. Religions of Southeast Asia

VI Politics in Southeast Asia

VII Southeast Asia in the Larger World

VIII The Future in United States - Southeast Asian Relations

Appendix: Maps

- *Countries of Southeast Asia*
- *Languages of Southeast Asia*
- *Religions of Southeast Asia*

POPULATIONS OF THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

(Figures are in millions)

Source: "Population and Vital Statistics Report: Data available as of 1 April 1989," Statistical Papers, Series A, vol. XLI, no. 2 (New York: United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Office, 1989).

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TEACHING ABOUT SOUTHEAST ASIA

I Introduction: Southeast Asia and America Since 1492

Southeast Asia is almost as far away from some parts of the United States of America as it is possible to get without starting to come back. Culturally, too, it seems distant, strange, and possibly dangerous -- a fitting background for a brooding Conrad novel, or a war.

But Southeast Asia is no longer as far away as it might seem. Situated across important sea routes between Europe and Asia, and itself a source of valuable natural resources, crops, and spices, Southeast Asia has long been a center of trade. It was precisely the importance of trade with Southeast Asia that led the Spanish to commission Christopher Columbus to seek an alternate trade route to the area -- one that avoided the Arab monopoly of the route through the Indian Ocean -- in 1492. Since this voyage was a prelude to European settlement of the Americas, Southeast Asian trade can be said to be important to American history from earliest times! And today, the six nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) -- Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand -- together constitute the fifth most important trading partner of the United States.

Moreover, America and Southeast Asia have been very much a part of each other's history since the beginning of this century. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have visited Southeast Asia -- as members of the armed forces or, more often, as students and tourists or on business. And more Southeast Asians have been coming to America to live and work in recent years than from many other parts of the world.

Knowledge about Southeast Asia is extremely limited among the American population, however. Most Americans no longer recall that the Philippines was once an American colony. Most do not know where Vietnam is, although we were fighting a major war there only a little more than a decade ago. Indeed, the horror of that war, the controversy that surrounded it, and the fact that it ended in American defeat -- all these together seem to have led the American people to wipe Southeast Asia from their collective memory.

Teaching about Southeast Asia is important, then, because Southeast Asia has something to tell us about our own history. There are some other things to be said in its favor as well:

- Because Southeast Asia seems exotic, teaching about it offers an opportunity to help students explore how very much alike human societies really are, even when they appear on the surface to be very different.

- Because Southeast Asia is a region where all the great civilizations of Asia have come together, and all the great religions of the world as well, it offers an opportunity to introduce students to these -- and to problems of human relations that are very similar to those that America faces, but in another setting, on the other side of the world.

- Because Southeast Asia is a large part of the Third World (it contains more people than all of Latin America, for example), it has all the problems of poverty and politics that we think about when we think about the Third World. Teaching about Southeast Asia, therefore, offers an opportunity to introduce students to these problems, not in an abstract way as when we try to talk about these problems in global terms, but in concrete cases that involve people and countries with names and personalities of their own.

Of course an individual teacher and class will not be able to follow all these possible approaches. The teacher will want to select one that suits his or her own preferred approach and that focusses on the theme that is being developed in the course of the year. The point is simply that all these approaches are available in the case of Southeast Asia and, because of the cultural diversity of the region, they are available with a richness that few other parts of the world offer.

II Where is Southeast Asia?

Teaching about Southeast Asia offers a good opportunity to set students to work on some geography that will be new to almost all of them. It is exotic enough to have fascinated scientists for centuries.

Geographically, Southeast Asia is the region that lies east of India and south of China. The Chinese knew it for at least a thousand years as the Southern Islands. The region became known as Southeast Asia only during World War II. But most people know it by that name today.

Southeast Asia is bordered by the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean and includes thousands of islands. Ocean trade and navigation have been important since earliest times. Indeed it was the Malays who invented the Lateen sail, which revolutionized sailing in the 8th century. Originating in Southeast Asia where monsoon winds blow in one direction for several months, this invention permitted navigators to catch the wind even while their ships headed almost directly into it.

Following a map from west to east, one sees that Southeast Asia includes the countries that are now known as ***MYANMAR (formerly BURMA), THAILAND, LAOS, CAMBODIA or KAMPUCHEA, and VIETNAM***, all parts of the Southeast Asian mainland. And then, following the map south and east, the region includes ***MALAYSIA***, which is made up of the Malayan peninsula and two states on the north coast of the island of Borneo; the small city-state of ***SINGAPORE*** at the southern tip of the Malayan peninsula; the small state of ***BRUNEI*** on the north coast of Borneo; the archipelago of large and small islands that comprise ***INDONESIA***, extending to and including the western half of the island of New Guinea; and the further archipelago of large and small islands to the north that comprise the ***PHILIPPINES***.

The region is divided geologically and ecologically. Tectonic plates under the ocean floor extend south and eastward from the Asian landmass, and the shallow seas shown on a physical map depict areas that were above sea level during the ice ages. People and animals travelled across the land bridges, and plant life travelled with them. Thus the flora and fauna of Asia are found in such islands as Sumatra, Java, and Borneo (or Kalimantan, as it is known to the Indonesians), including the elephant, tiger and rhinoceros, some of which still survive in the wild, principally in game reserves. Another set of plates extends north and westward from Australia, and the plant and animal life of the eastern islands is related to that of Australia. Here are found the exotic birds of paradise and marsupials. This division of the region was discovered by the great English naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace, a contemporary and friend of Charles Darwin.

The clash of the tectonic plates has created a major line of earthquakes and volcanic activity. Indeed, a large percentage of all the active volcanoes in the world lies in island Southeast Asia, and they have been a major factor in human settlement. The volcanoes bring large quantities of minerals from the depths of the earth up to the surface, and from here they are spewed across the landscape and into the air, fertilizing the soils and making them ideal for intensive farming. In areas where volcanoes remain active, such as the islands of Luzon in the Philippines and Java in Indonesia, the density of human populations is among the highest in the world. Elsewhere, tropical rainfall feeds the growth of tropical jungles, but the soils are thin, and the population scanty.

Situated astride the Equator, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, Southeast Asia has a climate that is hot and humid. The ***monsoons***, or strong winds that reverse direction in different seasons, are an important factor of life, agriculture, and navigation of the seas in Southeast Asia. Depending on the direction in which they are blowing, the monsoon winds bring cool, dry weather or heavy rains; the timing of the rainy season varies, however, in different parts of Southeast Asia. Students can learn much about the climate and geography of Southeast Asia by researching the reasons for these variations.

The geography of Southeast Asia is so extensive, and its ecology is so complex, that many aspects of the region are still largely unexplored. The same is true of its people, especially in the more remote areas. One explorer in recent years was Michael Rockefeller, a young man from one of the wealthiest families in America, who led an expedition to collect the art of primitive tribal groups in New Guinea. Michael lost his life in New Guinea, but his team brought back an extraordinary collection of boats, shields, masks, and other art forms that now fill an entire wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

III Americans in Southeast Asia

America has been involved in the affairs of Southeast Asia in many ways since the beginning of the twentieth century. The most dramatic ways have unfortunately been bloody. Americans have been involved in fighting three wars in Southeast Asia in this century. That says something about ourselves as a country -- and about the ways that Americans have thought about Southeast Asia in the past.

The first time was the ***Spanish-American War***. At the turn of the century, the last Spanish colonies were in rebellion -- in Latin America and in the Philippine islands. The United States intervened. In Cuba, where Teddy Roosevelt led a famous charge up San Juan Hill, American intervention led to independence. In the Philippine islands, however, it led to colonization. The ***Philippines*** was America's only colony, and it became independent only in 1946. But America did leave some benefits behind. The most important was a political heritage of democratic government. The Philippines was the first democracy in Asia, and it is still one of the few with a government that has been elected by the people in a fair vote. This is why so many Philippine men and women were opposed to Ferdinand Marcos when he avoided elections, and cheated when they were held. Millions of people all over the world watched on television in February, 1986, when the people of Manila filled the streets, stood in front of army tanks, and forced Marcos to leave the country. That peaceful revolution was one of the great political events of our time.

The second time Americans fought in Southeast Asia was during the ***Second World War***. The Pacific part of that war was fought in the Southwest Pacific and in Southeast Asia. The Japanese had occupied every country of Southeast Asia in order to be sure to have supplies of food and fuel for its fight against the United States. Americans under General Douglas MacArthur fought back up the island chain from New Guinea to the Philippines in a series of naval and land battles that are now famous in American military history. Many brave men on both sides lost their lives. The Americans were preparing to invade Japan itself when the atomic bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered. High school students of today have two reasons to learn more about this experience. The grandfathers of a great many of them fought in the Pacific War. And the way the war ended, with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, introduced a new family of weapons into human experience that we are still struggling to bring under some kind of control today.

The third time Americans fought in Southeast Asia was during the ***Vietnam War***, from 1965 to 1975. Many high school students of today are the children of veterans of that war. It was the most controversial war in America's history, and the only war in which America was defeated. The reasons for the fighting

were never fully accepted by the American people, and the experience has changed the politics of our country. Members of Congress have not been willing since to leave foreign affairs to the President, but have fought for a larger role in deciding foreign policy themselves. We have seen that most recently in the Iran-contra hearings. The Vietnam War provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn how what happens far away can have a powerful impact on our own society.

IV Southeast Asians in the United States

For the first two centuries of America's history, almost all its people came from Europe. That has changed in the very recent past. The Immigration Act of 1965, which was initiated by John F. Kennedy, dropped the quotas that formerly favored Europeans. This paved the way for an increase in migration from Asia, and by the 1970s there were twice as many Asians as Europeans coming to the United States to live and work on a permanent basis.

One large group has been made up of refugees from Indochina, especially from Vietnam. They began to arrive soon after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and by the end of 1980 they numbered 231,000. Another 55,600 were accepted in 1981 alone. The rate has fallen off since then, but the flow continues.

Another major group has come from the Philippines. Many Philippine men fought side-by-side with the Americans against the Japanese, and gained the right to become American citizens as a result. Filipinos also are among the most highly educated people in Asia, and have skills that are much sought after in the United States, making it easier for them to come here.

These Southeast Asians, along with people from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and India, are contributing to a new process in American history: the "Asianization" of the American population. These Asian-Americans are different in some respects from earlier groups. They tend to be more highly educated. And they tend to be economically successful in a short time. This has led to some discrimination against them, just as it has against some earlier successful immigrants.

Most urban communities in the United States now have sizable numbers of Asian-Americans among their residents. The children of these families are found in many classes in our schools. They are eager to learn about their own Asian heritage. And some attention to that heritage in the schools could go a long way to correcting stereotypes that other children have about them.

V The People of Southeast Asia

All the varieties of human experience are found in Southeast Asia. In the mountains of the mainland and the major islands, ***tribal peoples*** still live in ways that are largely unchanged from the ways their ancestors lived thousands of years ago. (Southeast Asia was populated very early in human experience, and the first remains of early humans were found there -- the remains of Java Man, for example, were the first to be labeled pithecanthropus erectus.) Young American university students still go to Southeast Asia in relatively large numbers each year to study these societies, because they tell us things about human experience that seem fundamental, and so teach us what is important about ourselves as well. In some communities, teachers should be able to arrange for one of these students to visit their classes for a day to talk about their experience.

Most of the people of Southeast Asia, however, live in the low-lands. Most of them are ***farmers***, and their most common crop is rice. Most of these farmers are highly sophisticated in their work, because their lives depend upon it. Much of the land is terraced where there are hills, or criss-crossed by canals

where it is relatively flat, so that water is available to as much of the land as possible. Modern research stations are developing new varieties of rice that have doubled production in recent decades. Modern fertilizers are in widespread use. There has been a revolution in rice farming in just the last two decades or so. It is part of what has been called "the green revolution." And it has had some of its most powerful impact in Southeast Asia, where many farm families have doubled their income, and now own television sets, motorcycles, and many of the other material things that used to be enjoyed only by city people. They also are now able to send their children to school; primary education is almost universal in Southeast Asia, and it is not unusual to find farm families that are sending children right on up to the university.

Cities are where the population is growing most quickly, however, because young people have been streaming to them to get a better education and in hopes of finding better jobs. Some of the cities of Southeast Asia are now among the largest in the world. ***Manila, Bangkok*** and ***Jakarta***, for example, all have populations that are larger than New York or Los Angeles. These cities have all the problems that big cities elsewhere have -- crowding, crime, homelessness, pollution. They also are where many new industries are located. Shirts and shoes made in these cities are now sold in American department stores. When people talk about protecting American companies from foreign competition, they often mean protecting American clothing and shoe manufacturers from the new companies making the same things in these Southeast Asian cities. It's a hard choice for Americans, because these other people are our friends, and these new industries are very important to them. How we decide to handle the problem will have a big impact on the cities of Southeast Asia.

A. Language and Culture

The region is divided culturally, but here the lines do not follow precisely those created by geographic and ecological factors or by political boundaries.

The mainland peoples of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Indochina speak languages related to Chinese, and are believed to have moved into the areas they now inhabit from Southern China in relatively recent times. The island peoples of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines speak another family of languages, known as Malayo-Polynesian or Austronesian, and are believed to have occupied the islands over a very long period of time. The population of Singapore is predominantly Chinese, although it also includes significant numbers of Malays and Indians, and was settled only in the 19th century.

The divisions of the region among countries are not as clear culturally as they are on the maps. Most of the current borders were established by European colonial powers, who were less concerned about ethnic and linguistic homogeneity than about the Western system of nation-states with well defined boundaries. On either side of these borders are usually found people who are related to each other, or at least speak the same language, and who were travelling back and forth, and trading back and forth, long before the Europeans arrived. There are also many ethnic divisions among the indigenous peoples and significant numbers of non-indigenous peoples in each country, most notably Indians and the "Overseas Chinese."

Chinese first came to Southeast Asia centuries ago to trade Chinese goods for tropical products. Others came later to work in the ports and on plantations. Chinese make up most of the population of Singapore, an independent city-state, and as a result of their industry, Singapore has one of the highest standards of living in Asia, second only to Japan. Chinese make up about a third of the population of Malaysia. People of Chinese descent also make up large minorities of the big cities of Thailand and the Philippines, although they have intermarried to a considerable extent, and most have become Buddhists and Christians, so they are relatively well assimilated into the local populations. Others of Chinese descent make up a small part of the Indonesian population, where they are nevertheless, in spite of their small numbers, the leaders of business and industry. The Chinese also have had a long history in Vietnam, and have had their greatest cultural impact there, but they have experienced serious discrimination in recent decades,

because they were Chinese and because they were mostly engaged in business. As the communists came to power, many of these people were forced to leave Vietnam, first going to China and more recently to the United States.

B. The Religions of Southeast Asia

Because Southeast Asia lies across the sea routes between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, explorers and traders have been interested in it for at least the last two thousand years. Missionaries have traveled to and through the region for at least as long. ***Hindu*** and ***Buddhist*** missionaries converted many of the people of Southeast Asia by the 12th century. Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Indochina are still predominantly Buddhist today, and traces of Buddhism can be found in many other parts of the region. On the little island of Bali in Indonesia, for example, which is famous for its graceful dancers and is one of the most famous tourist sites in the world, the population still practices a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism in its daily life. The Buddhism of Thailand is legendary for the deep hold it has on the people of that country. Many Thai boys still spend some time in Buddhist monasteries as part of their education. And many students of other religions, especially Christian scholars, have been interested in Thai Buddhism for what they can learn from it for themselves.

Islamic missionaries also travelled to Southeast Asia, and established schools of learning there by the 15th century. The people of the Malay peninsula, and the people living on the coasts of the islands of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi and Mindanao, were converted to Islam. These places are now parts of the countries of Malaysia and Indonesia. ***Indonesia alone has more Muslims than any other country in the world, and in Malaysia it is the state religion.*** Throughout these populations, a great debate is taking place about their religion and especially about how they should interpret it in the modern world. There are some who argue that the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran is right, that the modern world is evil, and that it is the duty of Muslims to destroy it. But others argue that Islam is not just about the hereafter, that it has lessons to teach about how to make the world a better place, and that Muslims should work with other people to make life better for everybody. This debate is taking place all over the Islamic world, of course. In Southeast Asia it is likely to work out in a way that is different from the Middle East. There is a strong trend in Southeast Asia to make Islam an independent force there, not just a reflection of what happens elsewhere.

Christianity was the last of the great world religions to reach Southeast Asia, coming only with the Europeans in recent centuries. Many of the European explorers, and the missionaries who travelled with them, were aiming to penetrate China and Japan. They failed to do so to any great extent, but along the way they established themselves in other places, and nowhere with greater success than in the Philippines. Except for the island of Mindanao in the south, the Philippines is a Catholic country today, the only one in Asia. Catholic missionaries also converted many people in Vietnam, and these people are cut off from the rest of the Christian world, and face many difficulties in dealing with their communist government, but it is known that many remain devout in their practices today. Other Catholic and Protestant missionaries converted the peoples of some of Indonesia's islands, and these Christians are an important minority and hold many positions of consequence in the country.

Confucianism is, strictly speaking, not so much a religion as an ethical system, and it is not present in Southeast Asia to anything like the extent of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. However, it is found among the Chinese populations of Southeast Asia, and these populations are as noted above, another important element in the great mixture of races and religions found in the region.

All these ethnic and religious differences have made it easy for conflict to break out in Southeast Asia, and made it difficult for governments to keep on good relations with each other and to keep relations peaceful at home. It is to the credit of political leaders that they have been as successful as they have in dealing with these problems. But they have not always been successful. Political ideas have contributed to the problems about as often as they have helped resolve them.

VI Politics in Southeast Asia

The "peoples revolution" of the ***Philippines*** naturally raises the question: Is the rest of Southeast Asia going to become democratic too? The question is important to Americans. We are proud of our political values, and we feel more secure when we know that they are shared by other people. It's when we see large parts of the world living under authoritarian governments, whether of the right or the left, that we feel uncomfortable about the future.

The short answer has to be: "No, but..." We are not likely to see democracy flourishing widely or quickly. But that doesn't mean there is not a lot of change going on. Or that many people do not look to the democracies United States, Western Europe, and Japan as models for what they would like to see their own political systems become. Many of the brightest young people in politics and government in Southeast Asia have studied in the United States and in Western Europe. They know a lot about us -- a lot more than we do about them. And they hope to see their governments become more open and responsive to public opinion. In addition, they have seen authoritarian governments fail in Latin America and be replaced by elected governments. They watched, with even more fascination than we did, the fall of the Marcos government in the Philippines. And they are following closely what is happening now in Korea.

Also, the Philippines is not the only democratic country in the region any longer. ***Malaysia*** became independent of Britain in 1963, and it has had a practicing parliamentary system ever since, with periodic elections that have been sharply contested. The system is precarious, because the native people of the country do not make up a large majority of the population; there is a very substantial Chinese minority, and it is a wealthy minority. These circumstances have led to a lot of bad feeling between the two groups, and some rioting as well. Malaysia now has the most highly developed "affirmative action" program of any country in the world; it aims to give the indigenous Malays a much larger stake in the economy. So far, the race problem and Islamic fundamentalism have been kept under control, and Malaysia enjoys one of the highest incomes in Asia. Students in American classrooms might find Malaysia's experience with "affirmative action" -- including the problems it has encountered -- well worth learning about.

Thailand also is moving toward a more open political system. Thailand is the only country of Southeast Asia that was never a European colony. It is still a monarchy today, and the king, the army, and the civil service, all ancient institutions, play a large role in the running of the government. However, Thailand also is an increasingly modern country, with a farming population that is prosperous, a business community in the cities that is in touch with other businessmen all over the world, and a middle class that is increasingly well off and well educated. All these parts of the population are interested in having a larger voice in the government. Political parties are developing, and the parliament is elected in open elections. The parties and the parliament are still relatively new, and they do not have the power of the older institutions of government as yet. But, many Thais feel that they are in the midst of a major experiment in democratic government.

Tiny ***Singapore*** is a highly authoritarian society. It has had only a single political leader for more than twenty five years. Lee Kwan Yew runs his country's affairs in a fashion that some consider rigidly autocratic, but he has made the city-state materially well off. For example, it has the largest system of public housing of any non-communist city in the world. But whether he can pass on the leadership to a new generation without major changes in the political system is uncertain. Singapore's society also is increasingly well educated and capable of forming its own opinions about the future. The government is increasingly obliged to take this into account.

Indonesia is far and away the largest country in the region, and was once the poorest -- an honor

it has been able to pass on to the communist states of Indochina in recent decades. It also is a hodge-podge of different ethnic groups, different language groups, different religious groups. And it is so spread out -- 1,000 miles from north to south, and 3,000 miles from east to west -- that it also has many different regional interests to satisfy as well. The Indonesians have had a whole series of regional and religious rebellions to deal with, and one bloody civil war that pitted non-communists against communists. For the past twenty years, the army has succeeded in maintaining law and order, and the economy has steadily improved. This seems to many observers about the best that can be hoped for in the circumstances. Young Indonesians would like to see their government more representative than it is, and more concerned with social problems. No one is predicting any large changes in the near future, however.

That leaves ***Myanmar (Burma)***, which retreated into isolation from the rest of the world in the early 1960s, and ***Indochina***, which has been more or less under the control of the Vietnamese. Myanmar (Burma) and the three Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos have been run largely under strict control; little deviation from official policy has been tolerated. Large numbers of people from Vietnam and Cambodia have left their countries seeking refuge elsewhere in the world. Political ferment was a new development in Myanmar (Burma) in the late 1980s.

VII Southeast Asia in the Larger World

Because most of Southeast Asia was colonized by Europeans and Americans, the region experienced the collapse of the colonial system after World War II. The achievement of national political independence in country after country is still a recent event in the memory of the people. National feeling is strong, and most Southeast Asian countries are active members of the "non-aligned" movement as a result.

The most significant international development affecting the region in recent decades, however, is the rise of what is now widely known as the "***Pacific community.***" For the first time in modern history, the major nations bordering the Pacific -- the United States, Japan and China -- are at peace with each other and are working constructively with each other in ways that were unthinkable not many years ago. ***One of the results of this "Pax Pacifica" is that the center of world trade has shifted from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, an event that some economic historians see as equal in importance to the shift from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic a few centuries ago.*** The non-communist countries of Southeast Asia have been among the major beneficiaries of this change in the political and economic relations of the region. During the 1970s, their economies were the fastest-growing in the world.

Southeast Asia has long been a source of petroleum and natural gas, hard minerals such as tin and copper, and tropical agricultural products such as rubber, coffee, tea and sugar -- all things that the rest of the world continues to need. The principal markets for these goods have been the wealthy industrial economies of the United States, Japan, and Western Europe. In return, Southeast Asia has looked to these same countries for capital and technology, and in recent years has been able to develop a wide range of new industries as a result. Now the most valuable exports of some of these countries are such manufactured goods as Nike running shoes, Timex watches, air conditioners, and electronic components.

This experience has had a powerful impact on Southeast Asian life and on Southeast Asian thinking about the rest of the world. The countries that have benefitted are the non-communist nations of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines. Organized in their own ***Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)***, they have not only seen their economies improve but they also have been able to speak with a common voice and so increase their influence in world affairs. Burma and the Indochinese states have meanwhile remained undeveloped and are now among the poorest nations in the world. This division of Southeast Asia between nations that have been outward-looking and prosperous, and nations that have been inward-looking and much less prosperous, is generally seen as unhealthy for the long-term peace and stability of the region. But it is not clear that the differences will disappear in the foreseeable future.

Putting aside Myanmar (Burma), which continues to be consumed with its own domestic affairs, the principal stumbling block to regional harmony has been ***the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia***. The non-communist governments have been demanding that the Vietnamese remove their armed forces from Cambodia, and they have been able to mobilize heavy votes in the United Nations every year in support of their position. This has isolated Vietnam very seriously. Until Vietnam can make peace with its neighbors, it is unlikely to obtain access to the capital, technology and markets of Japan and the United States. But without this, Vietnam seems unlikely to be able to do much to improve the welfare of its people.

The Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia also has had the effect of drawing both the ***Soviet Union*** and ***China*** even more deeply into Southeast Asian affairs than the Vietnamese war did. The Soviet Union has been a strong supporter of the Vietnamese; several billion dollars worth of Soviet economic aid have been pumped into the Vietnamese economy every year, but much of it has gone to military purposes. In return, the Soviet Union has obtained the use of air and naval bases in Vietnam that enable it to project its military power into Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to a degree never possible before. China has attempted to counter the Russians by supporting anti-Vietnamese resistance groups in Cambodia. The result is that China and the Soviet Union will have to be part of any settlement regarding the future of Cambodia. Otherwise, however, neither China nor the Soviet Union has much to offer the Southeast Asians. Both tend to be seen as long-term threats to the security of the region, and unable to provide much of the capital, technology or markets that the Southeast Asians need.

This is not to say that ***Japan*** and the ***United States*** are seen as wholly benevolent actors in the region. The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia during World War II left many Southeast Asians with strongly anti-Japanese attitudes, and Japan's economic penetration of the region in recent years has been viewed with considerable ambivalence. The United States, on the other hand, tends to be seen as a very large but distant power that has much to offer but is not very reliable in its behavior toward its friends and allies in the region. So long as the Russians have bases in Vietnam, many elements in the elites of the non-communist nations would like to see the Americans keep their bases in the Philippines. Their long-term hope is that both the superpowers will eventually leave these bases. But it seems unlikely that they will leave the region altogether. Because the sea lanes of Southeast Asia link the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the naval forces of both superpowers seem likely to be in Southeast Asian waters for a long time to come.

VII The Future in United States - Southeast Asian Relations

America's strategic interest in Southeast Asia is of very long standing. Since the beginning of the present century, presidents of both parties have seen it as in the American interest to assure that Southeast Asia, like the rest of East Asia and the Pacific, is not dominated by any power that is potentially hostile to the United States. Fear that China and the Soviet Union might together obtain such a position had much to do with the American involvement in Vietnam, and indeed the American withdrawal has been followed by greater Soviet and Chinese influence. However, given the present relations among the Soviet Union, China and the United States, the domination of Southeast Asia by a hostile foreign power or combination of powers seems to most analysts to be an unlikely prospect today. In addition, the probability of an international conflict in the region into which the United States and the Soviet Union might both be drawn is relatively low. For these reasons, most analysts view the strategic situation in Southeast Asia as relatively favorable to American interests at the present time.

There is one outstanding issue of some importance to the United States -- the situation in the Philippines. A communist-led insurgency has been growing in the Philippines for some years. The elected government of Corazon Aquino has proven unable to improve economic and social conditions rapidly. And American rights to the use of air and naval bases in the Philippines, the last such bases available to the United States in Southeast Asia, are due to end in 1991. Any one of these circumstances would be cause

for some American concern. The conjuncture of all three means that American interests in that country face a highly uncertain prospect. For mature high school students, following current events in the Philippines is a possible project in current history for which the U.S. mass media are likely to provide ample material.

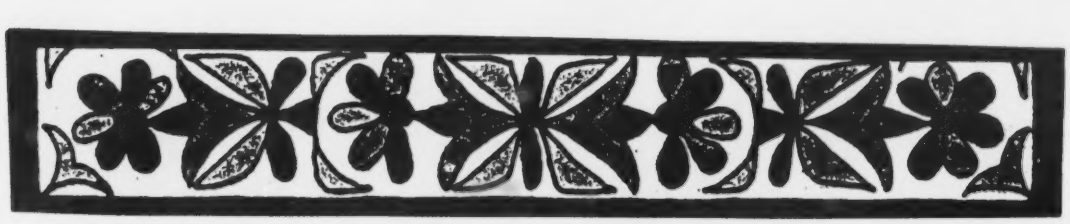
There also is one piece of unfinished business for the United States in Southeast Asia, and that is its relations with Vietnam. We still have not been able to recover the remains of many men who were "missing in action" during the war in Vietnam, and are presumed to be dead. Their families are concerned to bury these men in graves here at home. We also still have to recover from the blow to our pride that the Vietnamese inflicted on us. The stark memorial in Washington to the men killed in that war reflects the continuing national sense of anger and shame, in about equal portions of the two. Sooner or later we are going to have to talk with the Vietnamese, as we do with the Soviet Union and China. But it is not going to come easily, and probably not until the situation in Cambodia is resolved. Students who have a family member who was involved in the war in Vietnam might find this topic an important one to learn more about.

Although these are the topics most likely to put Southeast Asia in the headlines of American newspapers during the late 1980s, there is another that is equally important for the long-term future of the region and for the future of its relations with the United States. That is the interest of the people of these countries in their own continued economic, social and political advancement, and the interest of their leaders in maintaining a regional order that will promote these goals. These are also American interests. American governments led by presidents of both parties have supported the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its members by meeting frequently with their leaders, giving financial help to their economies when possible, and helping them become better able to defend themselves when necessary. Private American banks and corporations have been active in the region as lenders and investors. And many other American institutions, including our major universities, have made important contributions to the region's development.

This is not to suggest that the United States is at all likely to be decisive in the region's future. We have a poor record of intervening in the affairs of Southeast Asia, and our present influence is limited. But we can be a help or a hindrance to the region in pursuing our mutual interests.

The principal danger that leaders of these countries see is that we are quite capable of damaging their interests without intending to do so. How we dispose of any number of public issues in Washington can have serious repercussions for our friends in Southeast Asia. The fear is that the Vietnam War will continue to lead Americans to avoid thinking about Southeast Asia altogether. The hope is that recent events in the Philippines might have given Americans fresh grounds to renew their historic interests in the region.

If this hope is well founded, it is a good time to improve our teaching about Southeast Asia. Classroom teachers like the ones who read this note will be the ones who decide.



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SOUTHEAST ASIA

19

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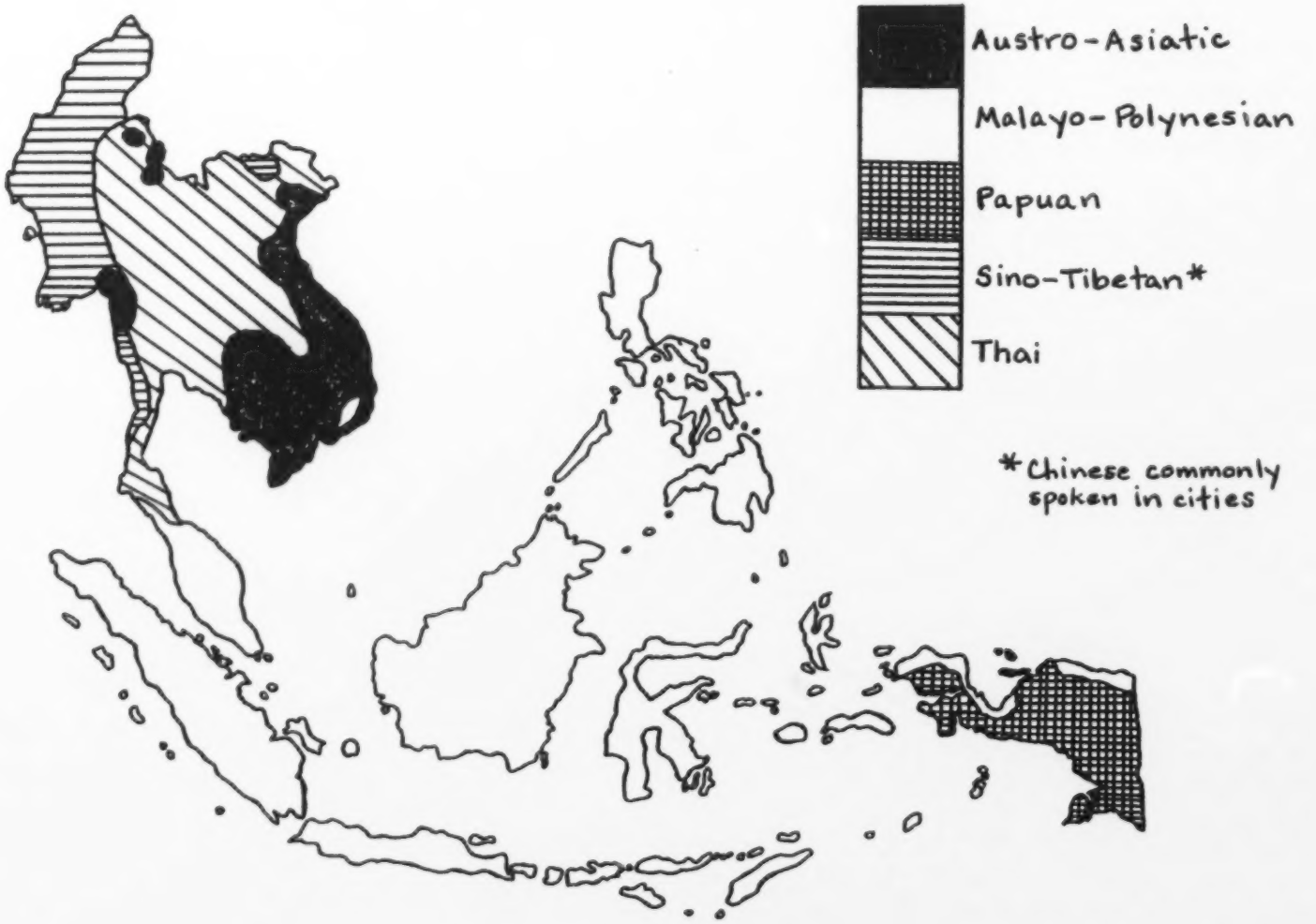

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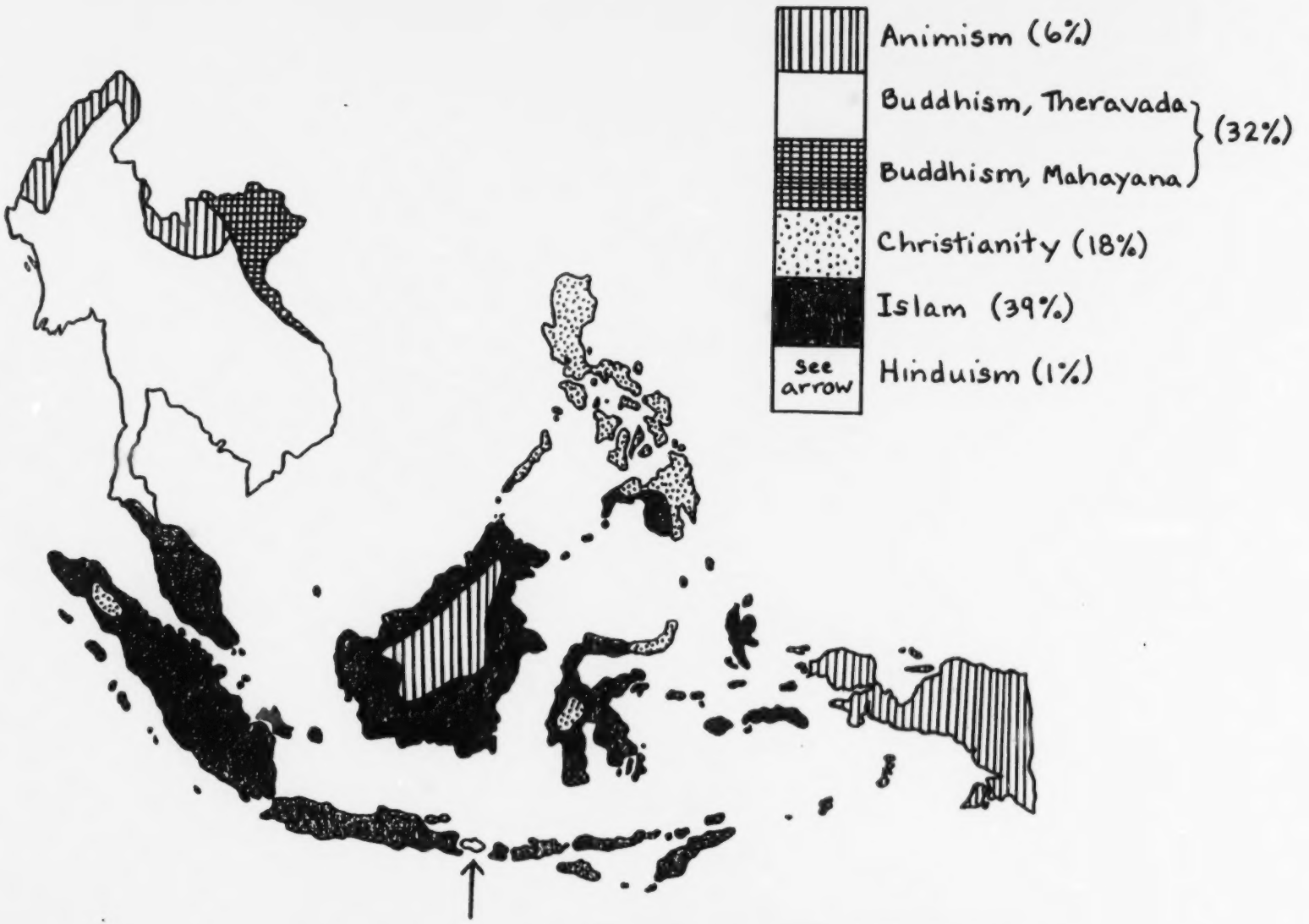

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